

## **The Power of a Godly Woman Deborah & Barak Judges 4 & 5**

### ***Introduction:***

We find one of the most incredible women in Scripture in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> chapters of Judges. Her name is Deborah. You may have noticed I skipped over Deborah in our study of Judges, because I wanted to save her for Mother's Day. Her name simply means bee. Like a bee, Deborah gathered honey for her friends, but had a fatal sting for her enemies. As a judge, a prophet, and a poet, Deborah stands out as one of the most remarkable women in Israel's history, and indeed in the history of faith. Deborah stands alongside other great women of Scripture like Ruth, Esther, Hannah, Jochebed, Miriam, the two Mary's, and Priscilla.

Deborah was a noble and valiant woman. With a steadfast confidence in the promises of God, she boldly acted on her faith. Through the strength of her leadership she rallied a nation to faith in God, and inspired them to overthrow their oppressors.

Deborah never sought greatness. It was thrust upon her. She never sought to lead a nation. She merely took what God gave her and used it to its fullest extent. She is not just an example for all women who seek the rare and precious qualities she possessed, she serves as an example to all believers of the power of faith and spiritual leadership.

We see in Deborah four powerful characteristics of a Godly woman. Judges 4 and 5 contains two separate accounts of Deborah's story. The first in chapter four is the historic narrative. Chapter 5 contains a poetic version which retells the story in song. We will focus our study on chapter 4 and fill it in with bits and pieces from chapter 5.

### **I. She Holds Her Ground When Everyone Else Has Given Up**

The first thing we see is that she holds her ground when everyone else has given up. Godly women will not give up or give in, even when everyone else has. On the spiritual battlefield it is so often the women who defend the faith to the last. Even after the men have abandoned their calling, shirked their duty, and compromised their faith, you will find a godly woman standing true.

How many men in how many families have abdicated their spiritual leadership? How many fathers have failed to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord? Yet, all the while, there is a godly mom or a godly grandmother, who prays fervently for her family, who reads

her Bible faithfully, takes her children to church, even though she gets no support from the men in the family. If I've seen it a dozen times, I've seen it a hundred. In my years of ministry, though, I could probably count on one hand the families led spiritually by men, without the support of mom.

How many are the small congregations whose torch of ministry is kept alive by faithful and fervent women? If the women stopped praying and stopped serving, these churches would cease to exist. In my experience I have found women much more willing to serve and engage in ministry, to respond to needs and reach out in love.

Women are the ones to hold the moral and spiritual line. They are the last to compromise and change their standards. No one is shocked or surprised by a corrupted man. We even say, "boys will be boys." Have you ever noticed that we don't say, "Girls will be girls?" It is expected that men compromise spiritually and morally. I don't say this to excuse the guys. I just want to point out the steadfastness that is more common in women of faith.

You see this working on a national level. When a culture begins to decline, it's the women who are the last to go. And when you lose the women, you've lost the culture. The men are almost always on the leading edge of going over the ethical cliff. The women are the first to resist. You can be sure that when the women are on the leading edge advocating the dissolution of a society's moral foundation that the degradation is nearly complete. When the women give up, the battle is usually over. This is why Paul writes in Romans 1:26, "Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones." When the women go, you're in bad spot. But as long as there are godly women willing to hold their ground there is hope.

This is exactly what happened in Israel. After the death of Ehud, Israel quickly descends into the cycle of sin again. Vs. 1 says, they "*once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord.*" As a result, God let them fall into the hands of the Canaanites under the oppressive might of their commander, Sisera. With the aid of his 900 iron chariots, He'd oppressed Israel for twenty years. Vs. 4 says that Deborah was judging or leading Israel at the time. Remember judges in ancient Israel acted as a political and spiritual leaders. We also need to remember as in the church, God had called the men of Israel to be her spiritual leaders. But where are the priests? Where are the Levites? Where are the elders of Israel? None of the men who should have been taking the lead could be found.

There was a vacuum of leadership in the land. The men had abdicated their God-given calling. They were all worshipping idols. But then there was Deborah. She did not turn aside to the right or the left. She held her ground when everyone else had given up. Praise God for godly women like Deborah. Praise God for all those godly women who pick up the torch of faith when it is dropped by reckless and selfish husbands and fathers. Thank God for all those faithful women who act as the conscience of the church and keep her faithful to her calling.

Though Deborah had responded to the need of leadership in Israel, she was not able to lead in any formal fashion. She led from the shadows in a remote location. She had no formal seat of power. There was no capitol. Look at vs. 5,

*She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.*

Deborah's capitol was a tree in the hill country in the middle of nowhere. This verse tells us so much about Israel's situation. The valleys and plains were the most highly sought areas. It's where the crops were grown. It's where the flocks grazed. It's where the villages were built. It's where the rivers and streams flowed. When a people were defeated and oppressed they were forced into the hills. There they lived in hiding. That is where we find Deborah faithfully tending to the flock of Israel, holding her ground when everyone else has given up. It was here that the prophetess receives some sort of vision or revelation from God. He had heard Israel's cry for help, and because of her faithful leadership, He now answers.

## **II. She Has An Unyielding Confidence In God.**

The second lesson we learn from Deborah about the character of a godly woman is that she has an unyielding confidence in God. Even while others are cowering in the shadows, a godly woman is willing to act boldly on God's will.

Deborah receives some sort of vision or revelation from God about how he wants to deliver Israel from the hands of Sisera, and Deborah responds immediately and she obeys completely. We hear no excuses from Deborah. She doesn't say, "Hey I'm just a prophetess and a poet, I'm not cut out for this military work. I'm the only one. Everyone else is afraid, how can you expect me to do this by myself. Surely, you can find some man to do this."

Let me show just how impressive Deborah's confidence in God is. First there was Sisera's technology advantage on the battlefield. He had at his disposable 900 iron chariots. These

chariots would have had an awesome presence on the ancient battlefield. They were a sort of ancient tank. Their mobility allowed for quick and strategic deployment on the battlefield. Their elevated platform provided the perfect stage for skilled archers or slingers. Their armor provided an excellent defense, so the archer could do his job.

These chariots had kept Israel in the hills for 20 years. But God had promised to deliver Sisera into Israel's hands, and Deborah was confident that he would. Chapter 4 doesn't tell us how He did it, but chp. 5 does. Look at vs. 21, *"The river Kishon swept them away, the age-old river, the river Kishon."*

Ancient writers tell how at certain times of year the valley surrounding the Kishon river became marshy so that it was impassable. It is no accident that God had the battle unfold in this area. Sisera's chariots were stuck in the mud. Suddenly, Sisera's battle plan is useless. His army is thrown into confusion. Sisera himself is forced to abandon his own chariot and flee on foot. If it was not for Deborah's confident leadership, this never would have happened.

Still more amazing were the numerical odds. Israel marched into battle with 10,000 men, but scholars tell us that Sisera's army was in the neighborhood of 100,000 men. But Deborah takes none of the credit for herself. She gives all of the glory to God. Look at 5:4-5, *"O LORD, when **you** went out from Seir, when **you** marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel."*

This shows Deborah's confidence rested entirely in God. Her confidence in God motivated everything she did. So often we're motivated by either misplaced confidence or fear. We can put our confidence in ourselves, our money, our ability, our influence, our education, but all of these things will fail us at some point. Deborah's confidence wasn't in herself. Self-esteem and self-confidence can only take you so far. What do you do when God is calling you to something beyond your ability? What you need is God-esteem and God-confidence.

Sometimes we are motivated by our fears, fear of our circumstances, fear of failure, fear of our mistakes. These fears can be paralyzing, but with a god-confidence we can overcome our fears as well as seemingly insurmountable odds. If God has called you to something, He will provide a way. You can have an unyielding confidence in God.

### **III. She Displays a Humble and Submissive Spirit.**

The third lesson a godly woman can learn from Deborah's life is that she displayed a humble and submissive spirit. For all of her amazing accomplishments, Deborah was not a bra-burning, man-hating, power hungry feminist. She wasn't vindictive or demanding. She wasn't trying to usurp the roles of leadership that God had given to the priests or Levites. She was merely filling a void they had left empty. She was not like Athaliah or Jezebel who did everything they could to destroy what God had put in place.

If you were a biographer writing Deborah's incredible story, there are many titles and ways you could use to describe who she was and what she did. You could describe her in terms of military leadership, and you could rightfully call her a valiant warrior. You could speak in terms on politics and statesmanship for Deborah held what was the equivalent of high office for her people. She was also a spiritual leader, serving as a prophetess for God. Through her, God made known his will to His people. Deborah was also an artist. She was a poet. I've already described how chapter 5 was likely Deborah's own account of her story.

But if you as a biographer writing her story were to get in a time machine and you were to ask Deborah herself what role was most significant. If you were to ask her what her greatest accomplishment was. I don't think she would say brave warrior, inspirational leader, renown songwriter or any of those things. I think she would say being a mother. I'm not just saying this because it's Mother's Day. I'm saying because it's how she described herself. Look at chapter 5:7. *"Villagers in Israel would not fight; they held back until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel."*

The things Deborah reveled in were being a wife and mother. She knew that was where her greatest power and influence were. Our culture has been lying to little girls and young ladies for 3 or 4 generations now. The world says the most important things a you can contribute as a woman , the most powerful things you can do, the most influence you can have will be outside your home and outside your family.

It's a lie. The greatest cultural problems we face from teen pregnancy to drug abuse, from sexual harassment to broken marriages all took off at the same time started convincing women to abandon their families and children for money, power, and influence.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying women shouldn't work outside the home. I am not saying that women shouldn't have positions of power and influence in the corporate world. I am not saying that women shouldn't aspire to high office. I've got no problem with any of that. What I am saying, and what I am convinced that Scripture teaches, is that a woman's greatest responsibility, her highest calling, and her most powerful influence comes from what she does or doesn't do in the home.

Scripture has a high view of motherhood, and we as a church, as the people of God need to keep that high view of motherhood no matter what our culture says. Behind the lies of the world is our true enemy, and the enemy will do anything to destroy the family, to break apart the bonds that forge the next generation. If we don't keep the family strong in the church no one else will. There is no greater calling, and we need godly women like Deborah who can rise to meet it. This brings us to the 4<sup>th</sup> and final lesson that Deborah teaches us about being a godly woman.

#### **IV. She Raises Others to Her Level**

A godly woman raises others to her level. She doesn't let others drag her down. This is what she did with Barak. She took an unwilling, hesitant, reluctant coward, and she shaped him into a courageous leader of thousands. Where was Barak at the start? Who knows? She had to go looking for him. He wasn't willing to be the leader. When she told him what God said and what he was to do, he would only go on the condition that she go with him. Then again in vs. 14 she had to urge Barak when it was time to go. By the end of the story however, Barak is a brave warrior pursuing Sisera on foot. Barak is remembered in Israel as a mighty leader and warrior. Under him Israel enjoyed 40 years of peace.

Barak is a different man at the end of the story, and this is all due to the influence of a godly woman. It has been said that behind every good man is an even better woman. There is much truth to that statement.

What Deborah teaches us here is an important lesson on spiritual leadership that applies to everyone. Both godly men and women raise others to their level, but when we're not walking with god, we tend to be dragged down to the level of others. Look at your life and the influence that exists in your circle of relationships. Do you tend to raise others to your level?

They become better because of you. Or do they lower you to their level? You become worse because of them.

We need relationships with new and immature Christians so we can disciple them. We need non-Christian friends, so we can have opportunities to witness, but if we are not having a positive influence in those relationships, then not only are we missing an opportunity, but we are hurting our own spiritual lives.

Ladies, you have a great opportunity to have such a positive influence on others. More than anyone else, you can shape your children's lives, don't abdicate that role to others. Older ladies, and those of you who have been Christians for a long time, there are many ladies who look to your example. Are you helping to raise them to your level? We already saw the Titus passage which talked about the importance of women teaching other women. Older ladies, we have a number of younger ladies in this church who need to be able to look to and follow your example. Young ladies, we have a number of high school girls who are following close behind you. Soon they will be making education and career choices. Soon they will be getting married. Are you leaving them an example that will make them better?